LIVES

EDITED BY JOHNNY DEE

BILLY BRAGG AT THE HOOTENANNY
Hammersmith Le Palais

Billy Bragg may be a folk guitarist, but his appearance at the all-day hootenanny at Le Palais is something of a diversion as a stream of wigglin' and skifflin' bands provide a live backdrop for bearded and pullovered computer operators and librarians to jig and 'take their pardners' in a drunken party atmosphere.

Almost apologetically, Bragg takes the stage and proceeds to play some of his more up-strummed songs in a tongue-in-cheek attempt to keep the pace going.

"I've been offered a lot of money to play this by the Lybians," he coyly announces before launching into 'Union Minor', an unashamed plea for working class solidarnosc.

Half way through 'Milkman Of Human Kindness' the audience becomes spellbound, which is pretty good going considering the lad has only a guitar for ammunition.

Of course, Bragg's lyrical ability and his unfettered commitment are the deciding factors, providing a one-dimensional live show which on a good night, like tonight, can be all-consuming.

The whole day is, in fact, a benefit for the Bristol Cancer Centre, a fact highlighted by Billy's inclusion of new song 'Tank Park Salute', a heart-warming letter of compassion for his late father who died from lung cancer. This song, with Bragg's face fraught on pure emotion, draws warm applause.

Bragg is then joined on stage by his mate Wiggy (the giggy) and the two exchange some fierce guitar sparring, giving way to a protracted speech on Nicaragua from Billy and a final acappella version of the socialist anthem 'Interationale', leaving the crowd with food for thought and a chance to get down to some serious wigglin' again.
Tim Southwell

●HOUSE OF LOVE:
"'Ere, this mic's a bit high innit, I'm not bleedin' Fish you know"

THE HOUSE OF LOVE
Royal Albert Hall, London

"This is all a bit weird isn't it?" apologises the amiable Guy Chadwick before filling Queen Vic's pleasure palace with his own tasteful mix of guitar mania and touching, gentle song-smithery.

New boy Simon Walker may not be the eye-catching whirling dervish that his predecessor was rapidly turning into, but when he cranks up his guitar and hammers his Verlainesque fingers to full effect, there aren't too many here tonight who miss the Bickering (sic) to any great effect. True he can't play the backward guitar at the end of 'Shine On', but this is real world kids, not a weekend break in an LA studio.

A brilliant start, 'Hannah' sounds great, though drummer Pete Evans struggles all evening against the guitar dominance and the hall's vastness. They've got The Mission's light show, a polite audience — save the bloke who actually paid for a box, and a batch of great songs that they've hammered to death over the past few months on a ridiculously long UK jaunt.

In fact, just occasionally when the fuse splutters and dies, you wonder whether they're a bit tired of doing this every night. But then Guy screws up his face again and urges Walker on while Chris swings his bass with alarming force and nervous manager/father figure Alan McGee bawls at the soundman's ear again and it all comes right somehow.

The House Of Love are not, tonight, the most polished, slick live act in the cosmos, but this is one of their more endearing qualities. Guy's nervous asides and "Thank yous" won't go down too well in those state come Yankee stadia, but tonight they're an honest testament to a man who's not altogether sure if he should be here in the first place.

The number of old songs played proves this is not a stroll through a new 'to be promoted' LP and just when you're sure they'll play 'Shine On Floor' next, they're gone. By the summer they'll be very tired but brilliant.
Andy Strickland

PHOTO: STEPHEN WRIGHT

JOHNNY CLEGG & SAVUKA
Bristol Studio

Through an atmosphere of sheer elation, Rochdale-born, African-raised Johnny Clegg comes across as an extremely likeable fellow. Fronting his relatively new South African band Savuka, this former university lecturer in Social Anthropology manages to create an extremely powerful blend of English lyrics and Western melodies with Zulu musical structures and dancing.

With offerings from his new album, 'Cruel, Crazy, Beautiful World', we hear songs that tell of the continuing struggle against apartheid in South Africa. And it's the passion for justice that clearly shows tonight. In 'One (Hu)man, One Vote', we are treated to an exhilarating display of Zulu dancing that has the audience hurling limbs in all directions. With catchy melodies and contagious dance rhythms, the overall feeling is one of joy and optimism — I've never seen so many smiling faces.

The hits 'Asimbonanga' (Mandela) and 'Scatterlings Of Africa' (a song that enjoyed world-wide success with JC's previous band Juluka) send fists skywards in a frenzy of excitement, and sparks off a girlfriend on shoulders' contest. But it's not all cries of freedom and oppression, 'Moliva' is a cheery little number about JC's recent traditional Zulu wedding and love for his adopted black South African culture.

With the reality of Nelson Mandela's new-found freedom adding a buzz to the night's celebrations, we can be sure that this extremely talented political and social commentator will continue to attract and delight audiences the world over. **Mark Barber**

WILL DOWNING
Hammersmith, Odeon

Will Downing was anxious as he came on stage. A throat infection had forced him to cancel his first show the night before. As it turned out, his deep and distinctive voice served him immensely well.

Downing is a fine contemporary soul man with simple and charming qualities. There's no room, no need, for the demands of the macho soul stereotype. The man's just too calm and homely for that.

The mellow mood of songs such as 'Free' and 'Sometimes I Cry' were just as satisfying as the dance songs 'SOS' and 'Love Supreme'. They were extremely tidy and tight, but not without feeling.

By his own admission, Downing's greatest fear after his throat infection was performing the wonderfully sedate 'Wishing On A Star' because it called on him to reach high notes. He got there, just, and it was the best song of a thoroughly enjoyable performance.
Justin Onyeka

A MAN CALLED ADAM
Decadence, London

Decadence night at the Town And Country Club brings out a fine selection of baggy T-shirt-clad punters. A Man Called Adam, though, couldn't see any of them. In fact, unless they had radar they wouldn't have seen anything, so flowing was the smoke machine. No wonder the singer kept on turning her back to the crowd. Playing before Guru Josh isn't easy these days, what with the scruff riding high in the charts, especially when your music is decidedly at odds with the Guru's melodic mayhem. Not that A Man Called Adam are short on melodies, they're just a bit more subtle. It's a little hard to see how the London trio came to be so identified with the imaginary acid jazz movement, other than the trifling detail of a couple of records on the label.

Terming them live house music is a gross simplification, yet that's what they are. The difference is the South American feel that punctuates their gliding, dreamy set, evident in the singles 'Earthly Powers', 'Musica De Amor' and even the harder 'Amoeba'. A Man Called Adam possess the same qualities that set Electribe 101 aside from the crowd. Watch them grow. **Phil Cheeseman**

PHOTO: JAMES ARNOLD

●CARMEL: "Aaaaargh! Who put chilli on the end of this mic?"

CARMEL
The Astoria, London

"Music isn't precious," declares Carmel McCourt before her marvellous, mournful vocals meander through a brilliant yet barely recognisable rendition of 'You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'".

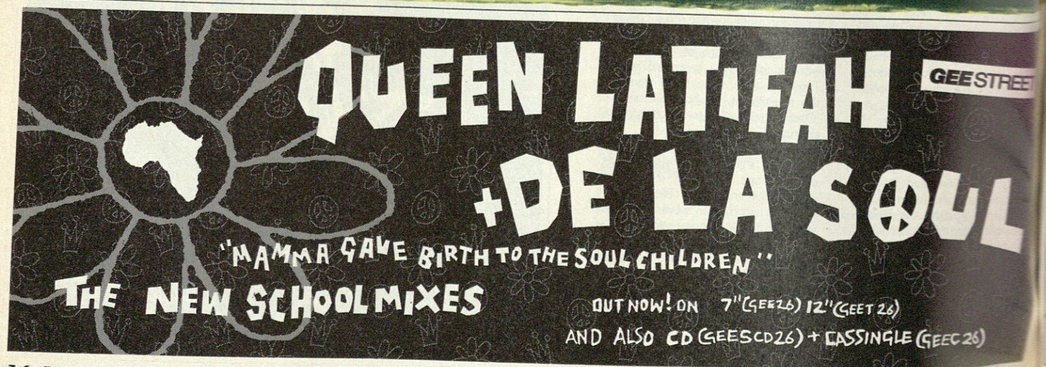
This down-to-earth sentiment and refusal to lapse into radio-friendliness, has kept Carmel, and their blend of jazz, gospel, folk and Broadway on the outskirts of the British charts since their initial success in 1983. This doesn't seem to distress them greatly, or adversely affect their wondrous live performances.

Ranging from Aretha-type churchy shouts, to eeked out, wafer thin and fragile notes, Carmel's pure and potent vocals are tailored to the band's diverse choice of styles perfectly.

This varied set has the four-strong brass section disappearing for such pared-down ditties as the evergreen 'Bad Day' and the frenzied double-bass and drums of 'The Drum Is Everything', returning to breathe life into the swinging 'You Can Have Him' and 'More More More'.

The starker arrangements though, prove to be Carmel's forte. The stirring, hymn-like 'God Put Your Hands On Me', the dreamy gentle lullaby of 'Birds Can Fly' and a superb cover of 'It's All In The Game'.

No, not all music is precious Carmel. Yours however, is priceless. **Gary Crossing**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